

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

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For immediate release:
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Unusually High Lead Levels Found in Ayurvedic Fertility Medicine

SAN JOSE, CA - Two recent cases of severe lead poisoning in unrelated Asian Indian adults in Santa Clara County has prompted the Public Health Department to issue a warning to clinicians and consumers regarding lead in an Indian Ayurvedic pharmaceutical medication, "Pushpadhanwa."

The pill in question is small, brown and has the imprint with "SDL" (Shree Dhootapapeshwar Ltd.). It was obtained in India by both patients, one female and one male, who were taking it as part of a fertility regimen that included up to 10 Ayurvedic medications consisting of powders, syrups and pills. All of the samples obtained were analyzed by M.A.C.S. Lab, Inc., an American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) accredited laboratory, and the "Pushpadhanwa" pill had the highest lead content at 73,900 - 78,000 parts per million (PPM). Lead ash is one of the primary components of this pill.

Both patients were found to have high levels of lead in their system, which is unusual for healthy adults. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has set the "Provisional Total Tolerable Intakes for Lead" at 75 micrograms per day for adults 18 years and older; 25 micrograms per day for pregnant or lactating women; 15 micrograms per day for children ages 7 -17 years; and 6 micrograms per day for children up to 6 years.

"Pushpadhanwa" has also been found online from out-of-country manufacturers. Four other pills and powders were also found to have significant amounts of lead.

"Although there are only two cases in the county, we felt the need to advise clinicians and consumers in case there are others who may be unknowingly affected by this type of Ayurvedic medicine," said Dr. Marty Fenstersheib, Health Officer for Santa Clara County.

Lead poisoning in adults can damage:

- Nervous System (irritability, headaches, shakiness, possible convulsions, coma or death)
- Digestive System (stomachache, nausea, vomiting or constipation)
- Blood System (weakness or tiredness)
- Reproductive System (infertility, sperm damage, miscarriage or fetal harm)
- Renal System (high blood pressure or kidney damage/failure)

Clinicians treating adult Asian Indian patients who present with these symptoms, even if mild, should inquire about the use of Ayurvedic medicines. If the patient is taking Ayurvedic medicine, a blood test screening for heavy metals is advised.

Persons taking Ayurvedic medicine for fertility or reproductive health purposes are strongly advised to speak with their physician.

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department has been working collaboratively with the FDA and the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) regarding this lead poisoning issue. The FDA is performing additional heavy metal testing on the medicines. CDHS is advising other local lead poisoning prevention programs about this potential threat.

For more information, please contact the Santa Clara County Public Health Department's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 408.494.7820

Dr. Fenstersheib will be available from 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Thursday, August 14 for interviews.

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